

NOTES ON THE SECOND EPISTLE OF PAUL TO TIMOTHY

\* \* \* **FAITHFULNESS DURING APOSTASY** \* \* \*

S.L.H.  
Soli Deo Gloria!

"Preach the word; be diligent in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine . . . And they shall turn away their ears from the truth . . ." (2Tim4:2-4)

AUTHOR: Paul (c. 67 AD)

AUTHORSHIP AND DATE OF WRITING. The epistle identifies the Apostle Paul as its author (2Tim1:1). The written testimony of early Church Fathers is unanimous in attributing the authorship of 2 Timothy to Paul. Historical tradition puts the execution of Paul by Nero in Rome during the early summer of 68 AD. In 2 Timothy, Paul is in prison (cf. 2Tim1:8; 2:9) and views his own death as imminent (2Tim4:6-8). Thus, 2 Timothy was Paul's last inspired epistle, written from Rome c. 67 AD.

WHO WAS TIMOTHY? See introduction to 1 Timothy for a biographical discussion of Timothy.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT. Paul writes this epistle to Timothy while he is in prison (cf. 2Tim1:8; 2:9); this is his second imprisonment in Rome, which is distinctly different than the first (see chart contrasting Paul's two imprisonments).

<b>Paul's 1st Imprisonment</b>	<b>Paul's 2nd Imprisonment</b>
A result of local Jewish persecution (Acts)	A result of wide-spread Roman persecution
Good conditions in a rented house; received many visitors (Act28:30)	Poor conditions in a dungeon; only Luke is with him (2Tim4:11)
Wrote prison epistles: Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians, Philemon	Wrote 2 Timothy
Released after 2 years	Executed by Roman Emperor Nero

Timothy is apparently still in Ephesus, left there by Paul several years before for the purpose of correcting false teaching in the local church (1Tim1:3; cf. Act20:29-30). This epistle may have been carried from Paul in Rome to Timothy in Ephesus by Tychicus (2Tim4:12). Paul is virtually alone in Rome (2Tim4:11), and his death is imminent (2Tim4:6); he asks Timothy to come to him and bring a few of his personal items left in Troas (2Tim4:13), perhaps the location where he was arrested (the second time).

IMPORTANT THEOLOGICAL ISSUES. 1) 2 Timothy includes the clearest assertion of the inspiration and sufficiency of Scripture in the Bible (2Tim3:16-17); for this reason its proclamation must always be the believer's (the Church's) highest priority (2Tim4:1-2). 2) 2 Timothy includes a detailed prophecy of apostasy within Christendom, and a

resulting persecution of genuine believers, that will occur in the last days (2Tim3:1-13).

THEME OF 2 TIMOTHY. The context of 2 Timothy is apostasy within Christendom and the persecution of genuine believers which, although already beginning during Paul's lifetime (i.e., the 1st century), will grow increasingly worse as the end of the Church Age approaches (i.e., "the last days"; 2Tim3:1,13). In light of this coming apostasy and persecution of true believers, the theme of 2 Timothy is centered around the charge to persevere and remain faithful to God and the proclamation of His Word so that the message of the Bible will be preserved for the next generation<sup>1</sup> (note that from the human point of view, the continuation of the Church on earth depends on the propagation of the faith from one generation of believers to the next, alluded to by Paul in 2 Timothy 2:2; its potential extinction is never more than one generation away<sup>2</sup>). It is a message that is directly relevant to all churches and their priorities today!

OUTLINE OF 2 TIMOTHY.

- I. Ch1: The Charge to **Guard the Gospel**
- II. Ch2: The Charge to **Persevere Despite Hardship**
- III. Ch3: (**Prophecy of Coming Apostasy and Persecution**)
- IV. Ch4: The Charge to **Preach the [Unadulterated] Word of God**

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<sup>1</sup> The epistle of 2 Timothy is, in effect, the last will and testament of the Apostle Paul. In it he expresses, in a personal and intimate way, his most urgent/important thoughts and concerns in light of his quickly approaching

<sup>2</sup> As an illustration of this, note that immediately after Joshua led his generation of faithful Israelites in the conquest of the Promised Land, "there arose another generation after them, which knew not the LORD" (Judg2:10).

## CHAPTER 1

### THE CHARGE TO GUARD THE GOSPEL

Paul's charge to Timothy in the opening chapter of this epistle is to "hold fast" (2Tim1:13) to the gospel of "grace" (2Tim1:9) which was delivered to Paul, and which he has entrusted to Timothy (2Tim1:14), despite personal suffering (1Tim1:12) and the desertion of "all they who are in Asia" from him (2Tim1:15).

### SALUTATION

- [1] Paul opens this epistle by identifying himself as "an apostle of Jesus Christ". Paul's apostleship was not something he had sought, but it came upon him "by the will of God" (Act9:1-16); Paul was personally chosen by Christ to be His apostle just as surely as were the Twelve (Matt10:1-4). Finally, in this last of his inspired letters, in which he views his own death as imminent (2Tim4:6), Paul alludes to "the promise of [eternal] life, which is [only] in Christ Jesus".
- [2] The epistle is addressed to "Timothy", who Paul metaphorically calls his "dearly beloved son" (Lit., child); in 1 Timothy 1:2, Paul had called Timothy his "own son in the faith". The benediction of "grace, mercy, and peace" is Paul's pattern when addressing individuals (but he omits 'mercy' when addressing churches).

### PERSONAL GREETING

- [3] Paul shares with Timothy that he is thankful to God for him, remembering him in prayer continually. Though many (perhaps most) who had labored with Paul through the years had eventually deserted him, Timothy had remained faithful to Paul for as many as 20 years.

Paul will address Timothy's spiritual heritage beginning in v5. Here, Paul asserts that he had "serve[d God] from [his] forefathers with a pure conscience". Paul did not view his conversion to Christ as a departure from the orthodox Old Testament faith of his Jewish forefathers, but as a fulfillment of it (Matt5:17); rather, it was the Jews who refused to receive Jesus as the prophesied and long-awaited Messiah who had turned from their historic faith (cf. Act17:1-3).

- [4] Paul had left Timothy to minister in difficult circumstances in Ephesus (1Tim1:3), perhaps as many as 5 years previously. The separation had been difficult for both of them. Paul will request Timothy to come to him in Rome (2Tim4:9,21).
- [5] Over the years Paul had ministered with many who in time deserted him and turned away from the faith (2Tim1:15; Cp., 1Jn2:19). In contrast with them, Paul calls Timothy's faith "unfeigned". Timothy had been raised and nurtured in the faith by a godly Jewish grandmother (Lois) and mother (Eunice); his father was a Greek and apparently an unbeliever (Act16:1-3).

- [6] Paul understands that Timothy's ministry at Ephesus is difficult. He reminds him here, and in his previous letter (1Tim4:14), to make use of "the gift of God" (i.e., a spiritual gift) which he received at the time a group of elders, along with Paul, laid hands on Timothy<sup>3</sup>—perhaps something of an ordination ceremony. There is no indication of what Timothy's particular gift was, but apparently Paul believed it was indispensable to his ministry. The allusions here and in 1 Timothy may suggest that Timothy was neglecting to make use of his gift.
- [7] Because of Timothy's relative youth (1Tim4:12), his frequent infirmities (1Tim5:23), the resistance he and Paul faced in ministry (2Tim3:11), and perhaps simply his innate personality, Timothy may have had a tendency toward "fear". Paul asserts that such a "spirit of fear" has no place in the life and ministry of a believer. In its place, God gives three virtues: "power" (cf. 1Cor2:4), "love" (cf. 1Tim1:5), and a "sound mind" (1Tim4:7).

#### THE CHARGE TO GUARD THE GOSPEL

- [8] To Timothy, who may have been timid by nature, Paul commands "be not ashamed" of either "our Lord [Jesus]" or "me his prisoner" (i.e., Paul has been arrested and is in Rome awaiting his execution as an enemy of the empire). It is to be expected that identification with Christ and the preaching of the "gospel" will bring "afflictions" and persecution (Jn15:18-20; 16:1-4,33; 2Tim3:12), in which Timothy is to be a "partaker". The Apostles Peter and John, in fact, had rejoiced "that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for [Christ's] name" (Act5:41).
- [9] Having mentioned the "gospel" as "the power of God" in v8, Paul calls attention to its most important characteristics. First, it is by means of the gospel that God "save[s] us" (Rom1:16; 1Cor15:1-2). Second, our salvation via the gospel is by "grace", "not according to our works" (Gall6; Eph2:8-9; Tit3:5). Third, our salvation is a result of the "purpose" of God, planned by Him "before the world began" (which is consistent with the gospel being according to the grace of God rather than the works of men; cf. Rom9:11; Eph1:3-6).
- [10] The plan of God devised in eternity past to save men via the "gospel" of grace required the work of "our Savior Jesus Christ" in history (1Cor15:3-4) in order to satisfy the justice of God (cf. Rom3:23-26).

The Gospel. Today, the definition/understanding of "the gospel" is being increasingly diluted (compromised). The gospel is NOT: 'surrender your life to Christ', or even worse 'invite Jesus into your heart'! Such understandings of the gospel reduce it to nothing more than a mystical, subjective, emotional experience. Rather, the gospel is the real, objective, and historical work of Christ, the incarnate God, on our behalf; God promises that the

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<sup>3</sup> That all believers receive at least one spiritual gift for the benefit of Christian ministry is normative (1Cor12:7-11), that it is imparted by the laying on of the hands of elders is not.

man who trusts in the power of this work of Christ for him is saved (Rom1:16; 1Cor15:1-2).

**The Historicity of The Gospel.** The gospel is not a fable (cf. 2Pet1:16; a 'fable' is a fictitious story invented to teach a moral lesson). The gospel involves historical events. Admittedly, it is the correct understanding/interpretation of those events that is critical, but that does not diminish the fact that the historicity of these events is necessary and indispensable. They must be real events that really happened: Christ died, He was buried, He rose again, He was seen in His resurrection body by many people (1Cor15:3-8). That Christ was buried is evidence to substantiate that fact that He really died; that Christ was seen is evidence to substantiate the fact that He really rose again! You do not include 'evidences' for a fable, only a real, historical event. In fact, Paul says that if the resurrection of Christ did not really and literally happen, our faith is "vain" (i.e., it accomplishes nothing!; 1Cor15:14).

- [11] God entrusted the stewardship/revelation of the gospel of grace to the Apostle Paul, who He sent out to teach the Gentiles (even as Peter was directed to instruct the Jews; Gal2:7-8).
- [12] It was because Paul was faithfully guarding the stewardship of the gospel, entrusted to him by God, that he was "suffer[ing]". Though the world looked upon Paul, awaiting execution as an enemy of Rome, as a common and despicable criminal, he was "not ashamed" (nor should Timothy feel shame; v8). Paul was confident in the knowledge ("I know") that the One in Whom he had "believed" was able to fully vindicate him in a future "day"; this is the Biblical picture of genuine faith that produces assurance (cf. Rom4:19-21). Note that Paul is not expressing any confidence in his own faithfulness, but is relying on God to "keep" him (Cp., 1Pet1:3-5).
- [13] Paul charges Timothy to "hold fast" (i.e., guard) "sound words" (doctrine, especially as it relates to the gospel). He was to stand doctrinally unmovable, yet do so "in faith" (i.e., trusting that what God has said and promised is true) and in "love" (Cp., Eph4:15). One is not showing love for another if he compromises on the truth; a false gospel damns, only the true gospel saves (2Cor11:2-3,13-15).
- [14] That "good thing" refers to revealed truth from God, especially the gospel. Paul speaks of it as having been entrusted to him by God, of him as having entrusted it to Timothy (Cp., 1Tim6:20), and will charge Timothy to pass it on to others (2Tim2:2). Paul charges Timothy to "keep" (i.e., guard) that truth entrusted to him (by the power of the "Holy Spirit"), especially in the face of persecution that will come (2Tim3:12).
- [15] In contrast to Timothy, who had remained faithful to Paul and the truth entrusted to him, "all they who are in Asia have turned away". This is obviously hyperbole (e.g., Luke is still with Paul; 2Tim4:11), but the point is there are relatively few who

have remained faithful<sup>4</sup> (i.e., it is the exception, rather than the rule). This includes "Phygellus and Hermogenes"; nothing is known of these men apart from this allusion, but they seem to be offered as individuals, personally known to Timothy, whose desertion of Paul was unexpected.

- [16] "Onesiphorus" is another exception, one who had remained faithful to the gospel, who had "refreshed" Paul personally, and who was "not ashamed" of Paul's status as prisoner (and presumed enemy) of Rome. It was one thing to visit Paul in his rented home (Act28:30) during his first imprisonment; at that time he was merely accused by the Jews in a religious matter. Now, however, to visit Paul, held in a Roman dungeon and charged as an enemy of the empire, was to expose oneself to the government as a possible co-conspirator.
- [17] Onesiphorus was a resident of Ephesus (2Tim4:19), but he had apparently travelled to Rome and "sought . . . out" Paul for the purpose of ministering to him.
- [18] Paul commends the faithfulness of Onesiphorus, praying that he may be rewarded by "the Lord in that day" (i.e., the judgment seat of Christ; 1Cor3:12-14; 2Cor5:10), in contrast to the unfaithfulness of Phygellus and Hermogenes. Paul is clearly exhorting Timothy to remain in the company of the faithful.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE CHARGE TO PERSEVERE DESPITE HARDSHIP

In closing Chapter 1, Paul commended Onesiphorus for remaining faithful to him (despite the personal difficulties that relationship could cause for Onesiphorus). In this chapter, Paul greatly expands on the theme of Christian perseverance despite hardship, giving 7 metaphors for a faithful believer: 1) a son, 2) a soldier, 3) an athlete, 4) a farmer, 5) a workman (artisan), 6) a vessel, and 7) a servant.

#### A SON

- [1] Notice the link here between "son[ship]" and "grace" (cf. Gal3:26; 4:4-7). A "son" is related to his father by grace (i.e., through no work on his part, the work to establish the relationship is wholly that of the father's).
- [2] The father-son relationship is primarily one of discipleship (Deut6:6-9; Eph6:4). As a father is to "train up a child in the way he should go" (Prov22:6), so a mature believer is to train "faithful men" so that the truth (especially the gospel, the charge of 2Tim1:8-13) will be accurately transmitted to the next generation. Notice that 4 generations are in view: Paul (1) has

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<sup>4</sup> Ephesus was the chief city of the Roman province of Asia (i.e., western Turkey). During his 2 year stay at Ephesus, Paul had taken "the word of the Lord Jesus" to "all they who dwelt in Asia" (Act19:10). Thus, the number of disciples who had fallen away from Paul could have been considerable.

trained Timothy (2), Timothy is to train "faithful men" (3), and these faithful men are to train "others" (4).

#### A SOLDIER

- [3] Paul likened Christian ministry to "warfare" in 1 Timothy 1:18. It is expected that "a good soldier of Jesus Christ" will "endure hardship" (2Tim1:8; 3:12).
- [4] As a soldier is so single-mindedly focused on his mission, such that he does not "entangleth himself" with matters unrelated to that mission, so a believer must not allow himself to be encumbered by trivial matters (i.e., any matter that distracts him from the mandate he has been given by his Lord in Matthew 28:19-20; cf., Heb12:1). The believer's sole motivation should be to "please Him who hath chosen him" (Eph1:3-4).

#### AN ATHLETE

- [5] Here, the "man" is an athlete. The believer's life is likened to an athletic competition in that an athlete can only be "crowned" (i.e., win the competition) if he competes "lawfully". God, the ultimate Law-giver, has clearly revealed His laws (principles). The believer can expect blessing from God (and success in ministry) only when he lives and ministers in conformance to God's will as revealed in His Word (Cp., 2Tim3:16-4:5). Even the Apostle Paul himself was concerned about becoming a "castaway" (i.e., disqualified, as in an athletic competition; 1Cor9:24-27).

#### A FARMER

- [6] A better rendering of this verse is, "the farmer must labor first before partaking of the fruits". Just as the farmer must work hard over an extended period of time in sowing seed, before it is possible for him to reap any fruit, so the believer must be faithful in preaching and teaching God's Word, with a harvest of results possible only after much labor.
- [7] Paul calls on Timothy to carefully meditate on what he is saying, praying that "the Lord" would give him the proper "understanding".
- [8] Alluding again to the "gospel" (2Tim1:8-10), Paul emphasizes its most important aspect: namely, "that . . . Christ . . . was raised from the dead" (cf. 1Cor15:4,14,18). Paul's mention of Jesus being "of the seed of David" calls attention to His genuine humanity (cf. 1Jn4:2-3; 2Jn7), which demands a genuine resurrection. With Jesus as our example, the believer must be prepared to be "faithful unto death" (Rev2:10), expecting our own resurrection.
- [9] Whatever the alleged charge that has resulted in Paul's imprisonment (i.e., sedition against the Roman empire), he asserts that he is actually suffering for the sake of the gospel. Though he is in "bonds", it is not possible that the "word of God" (especially the gospel) could be "bound".

- [10] Nevertheless, Paul is willing to "endure all things" (i.e., shame, suffering, imprisonment, martyrdom) for the "elect's sake". The "elect" are those who will be saved, known to God from "before the foundation of the world" (Eph1:4), but who must hear the gospel preached and personally believe on the Lord Jesus Christ (Rom10:14-17).

(A FAITHFUL SAYING)

- [11] Verses 11-14 seem to be a parenthesis to introduce "a faithful saying". It follows the metaphor of the farmer, the basic theme being that one reaps what he sows<sup>5</sup> (Gal6:7).

"For if we be dead with Him, we shall also live with Him" is the promise of **resurrection** for all who are in Christ (cf. 1Cor15:20-23).

- [12] "If we suffer [for Him], we shall also reign with Him" is the promise of **reward** for remaining faithful under persecution. The reward mentioned is that of reigning with Christ in His millennial kingdom (cf. Rev3:21; 20:4).

"If we deny Him, He also will deny us" is the consequence that believers who deny Christ (presumably under the strain of persecution) will suffer the **loss of reward**; the possibility of losing potential rewards in the coming age never jeopardizes the believer's salvation (cf. 1Cor3:13-15).

- [13] "If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful; He cannot deny Himself" is ultimate assurance that **salvation can never be lost**. A believer who proves to be unfaithful, for whatever reason, cannot lose his salvation because Christ [i.e., God], by His immutable nature, cannot be anything other than "faithful"; if He unconditionally promises eternal life<sup>6</sup> to one who believes, no subsequent sin on the part of the believer can annul that promise.

- [14] The assurances of vv11-13 provide powerful motivation for the believer to remain faithful to the Lord during suffering, while at the same time allaying unfounded fears (e.g., fear of losing one's salvation); for this reason, Timothy is to use them to encourage the brethren.

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<sup>5</sup> The four conditional clauses of 2 Timothy 2:11-13 have been interpreted in a variety of ways. Arminians have seen in them the possibility of a genuine believer losing his salvation, Calvinists that they are addressed to both unbelievers and believers. Since the theme of the entire letter is to exhort Timothy, a genuine believer, to remain faithful while enduring persecution, it is most natural to understand that these verses are addressed to genuine believers; this is reinforced by the use of "we", understood to be Paul and Timothy. Since the NT in many places asserts the absolute security of a believer's salvation (e.g., Jn10:28-29; Rom8:28-38; 1Pet1:3-5), the loss of salvation cannot be in view.

<sup>6</sup> Dr. Charles Ryrie, in arguing against the possibility of a genuine believer losing his salvation (described in many places as being granted 'eternal life'), points out that if eternal life once granted can be lost, then by definition it could never have been *eternal* life.

A WORKMAN

- [15] The "workman" is an artisan or craftsman. An artisan labors diligently to ensure that all the pieces of his work of art fit together perfectly<sup>7</sup>. In a similar way, the believer (especially the preacher/teacher) is to "study" (i.e., labor diligently, make every effort, *an imperative*) to handle properly the "word of truth" (i.e., the Scriptures). For the believer, nothing is more important than understanding the Scriptures; if the believer does not correctly interpret God's Word, he has no access to "truth" (Jn17:17), which is much more than the gospel, but which certainly includes the gospel. The believer who mishandles the Word of God should expect shame (i.e., disapproval) when he is judged by Him (2Cor5:10).
- [16] The focus of the believer is to be on studying and understanding the Scriptures. All other pursuits, as attempts to find "truth", are "profane and vain babblings" (i.e., useless, meaningless communication that is not from God), which Paul commands be "shun[ned]".
- [17] The shunning (v16) of unbiblical doctrines is more than avoiding them. Left unchecked, false doctrine will inevitably grow as "gangrene" and result in death; rather, false teaching must be cut out (i.e., refuted) as a "gangrene" in order to save the body.
- [18] Paul names "Hymenaeus and Philetus" (v17) as examples of men teaching a destructive false doctrine that must be refuted. By alleging that "the resurrection is past already"<sup>8</sup>, they implicitly denied other fundamental doctrines such as the bodily resurrection<sup>9</sup> of believers and the physical return of Christ; it is obvious how such assertions could "overthrow the faith of some" (Cp., 2Thess2:2).
- [19] "The Lord knoweth them that are his" is essentially a quotation from Numbers 16:5, where the LORD intervened on the occasion when Korah challenged the authority of Moses. As Israel had to choose to identify with either Moses or Korah in that ancient conflict, so believers in Timothy's day had to choose to identify with either the Apostle Paul (and his revelation from God regarding the doctrine of the resurrection) or "Hymenaeus and Philetus" (and their challenge of it); Paul had already taught the Ephesians that the "foundation of God" for the church is "the apostles and prophets" (Eph2:20).

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<sup>7</sup> The Greek word translated "rightly dividing" is **ὀρθοτομοῦντα**. This is its sole occurrence in the NT; it literally means 'to cut straight'.

<sup>8</sup> This error appears to be similar to one at Corinth (1Cor15:12), which the Apostle Paul considered so destructive he dedicated a very lengthy chapter to refuting it (1 Corinthians 15).

<sup>9</sup> For example, even Augustine taught that the new birth is the 'first resurrection', thus allegorizing the concept of resurrection. In the Bible, resurrection **ALWAYS** relates to the body, never the spirit. The spirit is said to be regenerated, the body to be resurrected. The Greek word for resurrection is **ἀνάστασις**, which literally means "to stand up again".

A VESSEL

- [20] The metaphor of a "vessel" (i.e., a pot, a pan, a plate, or a pitcher) is used for the believer. The vessel is not an end in itself, but a tool to be used in the hand of the master. As vessels come in many kinds for different uses, so believers have different gifts and/or ministries (1Cor12:7-11).
- [21] As a vessel must be clean in order to be fit for an honorable use, so the believer must be "sanctified" if he would be used by the "master". The Lord Jesus revealed that sanctification of the believer comes by the Word of God (Jn17:17), and Paul asserts in this epistle that by Scripture alone one may be "prepared unto every good work" (2Tim3:17).
- [22] Sanctification involves both turning from "lusts" (i.e., sin) as well as striving for "righteousness".
- [23] The believer is to be sanctified by the Word of God (v21), accepting it as his absolute standard of truth (Jn17:17). The flipside is that he is to "avoid" speculations that are inconsistent with God's revelation, and certainly the "question[ing]" of Scripture itself, since this can only "breed strife" among believers. A believer who questions the truth of Scripture is not "fit for the master's use" (v21).

Understand that we know the gospel only from Scripture. If Scripture is not reliable (i.e., inspired, inerrant, infallible), how can we be sure our gospel is genuine (cf. 2Cor11:4)? **To question Scripture is to imperil the gospel.**

A SERVANT

- [24] The final metaphor used of a faithful believer is that of a "servant" (Greek, **δοῦλος**, a bondsman; cf. Exod21:5-6). A bondsman is one who has willfully and permanently enslaved himself to another out of love for his master. This is the title Paul and the other apostles consistently use of themselves (cf. Rom1:1; Jas1:1; 2Pet1:1; Jud1:1).

The characteristics of a "servant" are that he is "gentle" and "patient"; here, "patient" is not the usual Greek work that has the idea of endurance or perseverance, but is a word that means 'forbearing of ills or wrongs' (used only here in the NT). Also included is "apt to teach", which is a requirement for a bishop/elder in the church (1Tim3:2; Cp., Tit1:9); faithful believer is one who is constantly involved in discipling others (v2).

- [25] A servant is also "meek", which is one who is in willful submission to proper authority (i.e., the Lord). A servant uses his gift of teaching (v24) to "instruct" others, especially "those that oppose him"; this has the idea of both teaching doctrine and refuting the errors of unbelievers. The goal of "instructing" unbelievers is to lead them into an "acknowledging of the truth" (ultimately to accept the gospel). The efficacious work, however, is God's; it is He who must "[grant] them repentance" (Jn6:44).

[26] Unbelievers are deceived by the "the devil", who actively works prevent them from believing the gospel (2Cor4:3-4). Here it is asserted that the devil has the power (authority) to take unbelievers "captive . . . at his will". This is in contrast to believers, who can only be oppressed by Satan as God explicitly permits (Job1:12). Apparently God's hedge of protection from Satan is unique to believers (Job1:10); unbelievers have no promise of such divine protection.

### CHAPTER 3

(PARENTHESIS: PROPHECY OF COMING APOSTASY AND PERSECUTION)

Chapter 1 ended with a commendation of Onesiphorus (1Tim1:16-18), who had identified with and ministered to the Apostle Paul in prison in Rome, even when to do so jeopardized his own security. Chapter 2 was a general expansion of the exhortation for Timothy (and all believers by application) to remain faithful to Christ and the gospel and to persevere despite hardship, even persecution. Chapter 3 is almost a parenthesis in the train of thought of Paul in which the apostle looks into the distant future and prophesies regarding the time of greatest persecution which will be associated with the apostasy in the last days; this is the most detailed revelation of the last days apostasy that appears in the NT.

**Definition of Apostasy.** The English word apostasy is a transliteration of the Greek word **ἀποστασία**, which simply means 'departure'. In Greek it can be used of any kind of departure, either physical or spiritual. The English word apostasy means 'a departure from the faith'. In the New Testament, an apostate (i.e., one who is guilty of apostasy) is one who, while identifying himself as a Christian, has 'departed' from Biblical truth (and the gospel of grace). An apostate is not a person who at one time believed the truth of the gospel, but has now fallen away<sup>10</sup> (i.e., has lost his salvation). Rather, an apostate is not a genuine believer, nor has he ever been one. An apostate is not one who merely teaches doctrinal error, but one whose beliefs and teaching are inconsistent with, and indeed undermine, the character of God (i.e., Father, Son, Holy Spirit) and/or the gospel.

### THE PREDICTION OF APOSTASY

[1] God reveals through Paul that "perilous times", or a time of great apostasy, "shall come" (future tense) "in the last days". Paul is addressing Christians, so "the last days" represent the final phase of the Church Age, which is a period of time immediately preceding the rapture of the Church (Cp., 2Thess2:1-12). The

<sup>10</sup> Definitions for Biblical terms in an ordinary dictionary are frequently inconsistent with the way such terms are used in the Bible. Dictionaries invariably give the definition of 'apostate' as a person who was at one time a genuine and zealous believer/proponent, but who has turned away from his former position. As used in the Bible, however, an apostate never genuinely believed the truth (cf. 2Pet2:1-19). For this reason, our understanding of such terms should always be derived from their usage in the Bible, not from ordinary dictionaries.

Church Age will not culminate in the conversion of the world, nor in revival of the Church, but in apostasy within Christendom<sup>11</sup>.

- [2] Verses 2-4 describe in detail the characteristics of apostasy in the last days. We must ask ourselves to what extent do they characterize Christendom in our day?

(See Chart: CHARACTERISTICS OF APOSTASY IN THE LAST DAYS)

- [5] In vv2-4, Paul is not describing characteristics that will prevail in the world (outside the church) in the last days; such characteristics always have and always will prevail among the unregenerate. Rather, he is describing characteristics that will prevail among those who label themselves as Christians.

Although such apostates have "a form of godliness" (i.e., they identify with Christianity, they are members/pastors of churches, they teach at seminaries, etc.), they "deny the power of it". Since "the gospel of Christ . . . is the power of God unto salvation" (Rom1:16), these apostates in the last days cannot be genuine believers since they deny the gospel itself. Paul's command to believers is "from such turn away". Separation from apostates is mandatory—if they are found in our churches, denominations, or seminaries, they should be expelled; we cannot prevent their existence in the world, but we must not allow them to masquerade as believers within our fellowships.

- [6] This verse is apparently a description of how the false teachers of Timothy's day had operated in Ephesus. They had gained a following by appealing to a group of "silly" (i.e., weak-willed) and sinful "women" in their own "houses" (i.e., homes), rather than teaching openly in the assembled congregation.
- [7] In the Greek text of this verse, there is no article with "truth" (i.e., not "the truth", but "a truth", or the concept of truth in general). Those who reject the authority of God's Word cannot come to a genuine "knowledge" of any "truth", not merely the truth of Scripture. If the truth of God's Word (Jn17:17) is denied, one has no basis/standard for ascertaining truth in any area<sup>12</sup> (Prov1:7; 9:10; Cp., Eph4:14).
- [8] Paul compares the false teachers in Ephesus to "Jannes and Jambres", who according to Jewish tradition<sup>13</sup> were two of Pharaoh's magicians. In both cases, these false teachers "resist the truth" (which comes only via God's Word; Jn17:17), they have "corrupt minds" (i.e., they are unregenerate), and they are "reprobate concerning the faith" (i.e., they are apostates; their teaching opposes/undermines the truth revealed by God, especially the gospel). In the case of "Jannes and Jambres", they even performed

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<sup>11</sup> I use "Christendom" as a term to encompass all those who identify themselves with Christianity, Christians as well as many who are not genuine believers (cf. Matt7:21-23). In contrast, the Church is comprised of all believers between Pentecost and the Rapture.

<sup>12</sup> Postmodernism rejects even the notion of the possibility of absolute truth.

<sup>13</sup> By mentioning (as factual) a detail preserved in extra-biblical Jewish sources, Paul is in no way offering a blanket endorsement of all Jewish tradition; he merely acknowledges its accuracy on a particular historical point.

signs and miracles to authenticate their false religion (Exod7:11-12; cf. Deut13:1-5).

- [9] But as the "folly" of Jannes and Jambres was eventually made manifest (Exod9:11), so all false teachers (of Timothy's day and the last days) will also be exposed by God as counterfeiter peddling a counterfeit (thus, powerless) gospel (cf. 2Cor11:4,13-15).
- [10] In contrast to the false teachers, Timothy has "fully known" (because Paul has held back nothing he received from God; cf. Act20:27) the genuine revelation from God, described here as Paul's "doctrine". Furthermore, he has witnessed Paul's godly "life". Both of these stand in stark contrast to the teaching and behaviors<sup>14</sup> of the apostates of his day.
- [11] Paul's life, witnessed personally by Timothy, was one of faithfulness during "persecutions" and "afflictions".
- [12] Paul asserts that his Christian experience is not an exception, but the rule. Those who "live godly in Christ Jesus" should expect to "suffer persecution" (cf. Jn15:18-20; 16:1-4,33; Rom8:18).
- [13] The progress of apostasy will "wax worse and worse" (i.e., ever increasing in the content of deception and the extent of its influence) throughout the course of the Church Age (i.e., from the Day of Pentecost to the Rapture of the Church). As the Church Age approaches its end, we should not expect revival<sup>15</sup>, but ever increasing apostasy.
- [14] In the context of coming apostasy and persecution of genuine believers, Paul commands Timothy to "continue . . . in the things which thou hast learned" (which, according to v15, came from "scripture"). Timothy has come to an "assur[ance]" of the truth from Scripture, taught to him by godly Christians (i.e., his mother and grandmother, and the Apostle Paul; 1Tim1:5); we cannot be (correctly) taught the Word of God by unbelievers, since Paul elsewhere stresses that unbelievers do not receive, and cannot know, spiritual things (1Cor2:14).
- [15] Timothy's knowledge of "salvation" was obtained from "the holy scriptures". But it is not the scriptures which save a person; rather, the scriptures merely make known the gospel, while it is "through [personal] faith which is in Christ Jesus" that a person appropriates that salvation.

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<sup>14</sup> This verse suggests that in judging the message of would-be teachers of God's Word, an evaluation of their lifestyles is appropriate (Matt7:15-20). Though no one is without sin, a lifestyle characterized by worldliness, greed, and debauchery disqualifies one from being a teacher (1Tim3:2-3; Tit1:6-11).

<sup>15</sup> As Bible-believing Christians, this understanding should not result in spiritual depression. We have not been called to transform this present (fallen) world into the Paradise of God. The Church has not been called to convert the world, but to evangelize the world (i.e., make the truth of God and the gospel of Jesus Christ known to the world; Matt28:19-20; Mk16:15-16; Act1:8). At the Judgment Seat of Christ, we will not be evaluated on our (apparent) successes, but on our faithfulness during a time of ever increasing apostasy and persecution.

While some have taken Paul's reference to Timothy as his "own son in the faith" (1Tim1:2) to be an indication that it was Paul who was responsible for Timothy's conversion, this verse would seem to indicate that Timothy was nurtured in the knowledge of scripture from "child[hood]" and had been a believer from a very young age; when Paul first encountered Timothy in Lystra, he was already a "disciple" who was "well reported of by the brethren" (Act16:1-2).

- [16] Paul asserts that "all scripture" is the product of "inspiration of God". The English phrase "is given by inspiration of God" is the translation of a single word in the Greek text (θεόπνευστος) which could be literally rendered "God-breathed". The "inspiration" of Scripture includes as a direct and necessary consequence its **inerrancy** and **infallibility**.

By "all scripture", Paul has in mind both the Old and New Testaments in their entirety; it is not that some portions of the Bible are inspired, and others are not, but that the Bible as a whole<sup>16</sup> is inspired. Since every portion of the Bible is inspired, every portion is without error.

Take particular care to note that it is "scripture" that was inspired by God. The Greek word that is translated "scripture" is γραφή, which means 'writings'. It was not the prophets or apostles (i.e., the writers of Scripture; 2Pet1:20-21) who were inspired by God, but it was the words<sup>17</sup> they wrote down that were so inspired. Thus, it is not merely the 'message' of Scripture that is inspired, but the very **words** used to communicate the message that are inspired<sup>18</sup>.

Since Scripture (i.e., the Bible in its entirety) is a perfect, supernatural, inerrant, and infallible product of God, it (and it alone; cf. v17) is "profitable for" (i.e., to be used for) four activities: 1) "doctrine", or 'teaching'. There is no source of truth apart from the Word of God (Jn17:17); 2) "reproof". That is, convicting (or convincing) one of sin; while this activity is a work of the Holy Spirit, He performs it by means of the Word of God (Cp., Jn16:8); 3) "correction". This is the exposing of error and/or false teaching; and 4) "instruction in righteousness". While the process of sanctifying the believer is a work of the Holy Spirit, He always accomplishes His work through the Word of God (Jn17:17; 1Cor2:13; Cp., Eph5:18 with Col3:16; cf. Prov1:23). Note that God's purposes for Scripture extend far beyond merely transmitting the gospel of salvation (v15).

- [17] Whereas verse 16 asserts the inspiration of Scripture, verse 17 asserts its **sufficiency**. By means of Scripture alone, the "man of God" (i.e., the believer) may be made "perfect". Paul almost always uses "perfect" in the sense of 'complete' or 'mature' (Cp.,

<sup>16</sup> This attribute is referred to as the *plenary* inspiration of Scripture.

<sup>17</sup> This attribute is referred to as the *verbal* inspiration of Scripture.

<sup>18</sup> Some have argued that the Greek word commonly used in the NT for the "word" [of God], λόγος, can itself mean 'message'. This is true. However, this Greek word used in the plural never carries the idea merely of a 'message', but rather the particular words used to convey the message. Jesus said, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words (λόγοι, the plural of λόγος) shall not pass away" (Matt24:35).

Gal3:3; Eph4:13). Scripture contains everything necessary for both salvation (v15) and growing the believer into a mature Christian who is "thoroughly furnished" (i.e., completely equipped) for "all good works" the Lord desires for him to accomplish (Cp., Eph2:10).

#### CHAPTER 4

##### THE CHARGE TO PREACH THE [UNADULTERATED] WORD OF GOD

The Apostle Paul's charge to continue to preach the unadulterated Word of God, which immediately follows his most extended and detailed revelation of a ubiquitous coming apostasy (Ch3), is most significant. When the time comes that the 'old fashioned' preaching of the Word of God seems to be less effective or ineffective, what should believers do? Should we change the message (i.e., the Word of God), or should we change the medium of delivery (i.e., preaching; cf. 1Cor1:21)? Paul's answer is an unequivocal NO; **change nothing!**

- [1] Paul now introduces his final "charge" to "Timothy". The extreme gravity of this charge is evident in the two witnesses Paul invokes, "God, and the Lord Jesus Christ" (cf. Deut19:15; 2Cor13:1). It is "the Lord Jesus Christ" who will judge Timothy (and all believers; 1Cor3:13) for their faithfulness in this life at His judgment seat (2Cor5:10) when He "appear[s]" at the end of this age to establish His millennial "kingdom" on earth.
- [2] The charge is clear and simple, "Preach the word". This charge embodies two aspects, both the message to be transmitted and the means of its transmission. First, since it is the Word of God alone that is inspired (2Tim3:16), and since it alone is profitable for equipping the believer for every good work (2Tim3:17), the message to be transmitted is God's revelation given in His Word; this includes, most importantly, the gospel (e.g., 1Cor15:3-4), but it is surely not limited to the gospel, for "**all scripture**" is inspired and profitable for the believer (2Tim3:16-7). Second, the means of transmission is also specified. It is the "preach[ing]" of the word that is God's ordained means of communicating His truth (especially the gospel)—not lifestyle evangelism, not dramatic interpretations, not movies, but rather the written/spoken Word of God.

Here, "in season, out of season" anticipates there will be times when the preached message will be (apparently) readily received, bearing much fruit, as well as times when it will appear to bear little or no fruit (e.g., the time of apostasy in the last days; 2Tim3:1ff); during both "season[s]", the means (preaching) and the message (the Word of God) are to remain unchanged. The "word" alone is to be used for all of its divinely appointed purposes: to "reprove" ('reproof' in 2Tim3:16), to "rebuke" ('correction' in 2Tim3:16), to "exhort" ('instruction in righteousness' in 2Tim3:16), and to teach "doctrine" (also 'doctrine' in 2Tim3:16).

- [3] Expanding upon his note regarding preaching the word "out of season" (v2), Paul reveals that "the time will come" (e.g., the time of apostasy in the last days; 2Tim3:1ff) when hearers of the preached word "will not endure" it. Rather than repenting and

submitting to the Word of God and sound doctrine derived from it, they will seek out preachers who have a different message (one that is not consistent with the Word of God), a message that satisfies "their own lusts" (and requires no repentance).

- [4] In such a "season" of apostasy, most people will reject "the truth" (the Greek text includes the article, so this is a reference to the Word of God; Jn17:17) and willingly embrace "fables"<sup>19</sup> (Cp., Jer5:30-31). Whereas the emphasis up to this point has been on the evil motives of those who teach false doctrine, he now condemns those who enable them by readily receiving their teaching<sup>20</sup>.
- [5] "But . . . thou" sets Timothy apart from this pattern of the apostates. He is to "watch . . . in all things" (i.e., carefully guard both his own behavior and the doctrine he teaches; 1Tim4:16). He is to be prepared to "endure afflictions", which Paul has prophesied will increase both in time (2Tim3:13) and to the degree to which believers live godly lives before the world (2Tim3:12). He is to "do the work of an evangelist", meaning that the heart of his ministry is to be the propagation of the gospel. Finally, he is to "make full proof of [his] ministry", which means he is to fulfill those works of ministry God has prepared him to perform (2Tim3:17; Eph2:10).
- [6] Paul reveals that his own death is near. His death will genuinely be a martyrdom, as he will be executed (at the command of Nero) as an enemy of the Roman empire because of his undivided loyalty to the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul confesses that he is now "ready to be offered" (Lit., 'ready to be poured out'), an expression used of the drink offering made to the LORD (Num28:7; Cp., Philip2:17). The fact that this letter of Paul to Timothy was knowingly written as the final communication between the apostle and his closest disciple adds emphasis to its message; that is, 2 Timothy contains the last and most important words of the Apostle Paul.
- [7] Facing death, Paul evaluates his own life and ministry. He commends himself on three points: 1) he has "fought a good fight" (cf. 1Tim1:18). That is, he has spent his life in the service of the Lord Jesus Christ and the defense of His gospel, which is the worthiest of all endeavors; 2) he has "finished [his] course" (). He has completed all the works ordained for him by God (Eph2:10); and 3) he has "kept the faith" by transmitting the unadulterated truth of God to the next generation (2Tim2:2). Would that every believer be able to say this of himself at the end of his life.
- [8] Paul's description of himself in v7 as having "finished the course" is an athletic analogy of completing a race. As the victor in Greek competitions received a "crown" (i.e., a laurel

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<sup>19</sup> A "fable" is a fictitious (i.e., untrue) story devised to teach a moral lesson. The Word of God is both "true" (Ps119:160) and "truth" (Jn17:17), not a collection of fictitious stories; the Apostle Peter asserted that the writers of Scripture had not "devised fables" (2Pet1:16).

<sup>20</sup> Paul Crouch, Benny Hinn, Kenneth Copeland, Joyce Meyers, Joel Osteen (and all such ilk), would not be the multi-millionaires they are, with global platforms to propagate their false teaching, if a multitude of (so-called) Christians were not sending them money. Paul says both the false teachers and their eager audiences are a sign of apostasy.

wreath; 1Cor9:25), so he expected to be awarded a "crown of righteousness" for successfully completing the Christian life. This "crown" is a metaphor for a reward<sup>21</sup> to be received from "the Lord, the righteous judge" at the Judgment Seat of Christ (i.e., "that day"; 2Cor5:10). This particular category of reward is not to be given to the Apostle Paul alone, but is available to all believers who "love [Christ's] appearing" (Philip3:20).

#### CONCLUSIONS

- [9] In concluding his letter, Paul requests that Timothy come to him in Rome. His request that Timothy come "shortly" (i.e., quickly) is in light of his imminent death (v6).
- [10] Those who had previously been with Paul have left him. Undoubtedly "Titus" had been sent away by Paul on an important mission<sup>22</sup>. Others, like "Demas" (cf. Col4:14; Philem24), had "forsaken" Paul because of the personal danger associating with him at this time entailed.
- [11] Only "Luke" has remained with Paul in Rome. Paul requests that Timothy bring "Mark" with him as well. Though Paul had been disappointed when Mark abandoned him years before during his first missionary journey (Act13:13), and refused to take him on his second missionary journey (Act15:37-38), Paul now considers Mark "profitable to [him] for the ministry".
- [12] This letter was carried to Timothy in Ephesus by "Tychicus", whom Paul also used to summon Titus from Crete.
- [13] When Paul was arrested, perhaps in "Troas", he was unable to bring certain personal items with him. He asks Timothy to bring with him a "cloak" (Paul is now confined in a damp and dank dungeon, and he is no doubt cold) left in Troas (through which Timothy would naturally travel on his way from Ephesus to Rome). He also asks him to bring both his "books" and his "parchments". The word translated "books" is the Greek βιβλία, commonly used at this time for scrolls, and is almost certainly a reference to Paul's copies of the Old Testament scriptures. More interesting is the word translated "parchments", which is a Latin (not Greek) word, which denoted parchment notebooks, and which were a nascent form of the codex that was brought into widespread use by the early Christians in propagating the New Testament scriptures. Thus, in asking Timothy to bring his "books" and "parchments", Paul was in effect asking him to bring all his copies of both the Old and New Testament scriptures (i.e., the Bible).

The Study of Scripture. It is interesting to note that even the apostles (e.g., Paul) and prophets (e.g., Daniel; cf. Dan9:2), who

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<sup>21</sup> Rewards are given to believers for good works/faithful service (1Cor3:11-15); they are over and above eternal life which is a free gift given to all believers by grace alone. Salvation has nothing at all to do with a believer's good works (Eph2:8-9), but rewards are based entirely on them.

<sup>22</sup> Though Titus had been left by Paul in Crete (Tit1:5), just as Timothy had been left in Ephesus, he had probably already been recalled from there by the apostle (Tit3:12).

were recipients of direct revelation from God, themselves diligently studied Scripture.

- [14] "Alexander" was a false teacher known to Timothy (1Tim1:20), and may be the Alexander at Ephesus in Acts 19:33-34, who had apparently done "much evil" to Paul personally. Paul has refrained from any attempt at personal revenge, rather trusting that "the Lord [will] reward him according to his works" (Rom12:19).
- [15] Paul warns Timothy to "beware" of Alexander (v14), who had opposed the "words" (i.e., teaching) of Paul and who would undoubtedly oppose Timothy's as well.
- [16] This does not refer to Paul's first imprisonment, during which many of his friends stood with him. Rather, it probably refers to a preliminary hearing he's already had during this second imprisonment, at which time "all forsook [him]". This forsaking of the apostle by these believers (v10) was a sin on their part, for which Paul prays that God would show them mercy.
- [17] Though "all men forsook" Paul (v16), "the Lord stood with [him]" (Heb13:5). Paul was confident that the Lord would "deliver" him from every earthly enemy, until His purpose for Paul was completed; that purpose was that through Paul's "preaching" the "Gentiles might hear" the gospel (Act9:15; Gal2:8).
- [18] Ultimately, Paul knew the Lord would "preserve" him unto His "heavenly kingdom", which is not a metaphor for heaven, but refers to the coming millennial kingdom **on earth** (Cp., Matt6:10); since Paul understood he was about to physically die, his confidence was in a future bodily resurrection.
- [19] As Paul often does, he adds personal notes to the end of his epistle. He asks that Timothy "greet [Priscilla] and Aquila" as well as "the household of Onesiphorus". The family of Onesiphorus obviously lived in Ephesus (cf. 2Tim1:16-18), and this suggests that Priscilla and Aquila must have resided there (or nearby) at this time as well.
- [20] Paul updates Timothy on the whereabouts of "Erastus" and "Trophimus", with whom he had labored beside Paul in times past.
- [21] Paul reiterates (v9) his request that Timothy "come [to be with him in Rome] before winter", emphasizing the urgency of the request in light of his approaching death. Paul sends greetings to Timothy on behalf of several of their acquaintances; this does not mean that these individuals are currently in Rome, since "only Luke" is with Paul at this time (v11), but probably means they have been with Paul more recently than with Timothy.
- [22] Paul closes every epistle by commending his readers (in this case Timothy) to the grace of God. No one understood the grace of God more than the Apostle Paul, who had benefited so uniquely from it (1Tim1:12-15; note the principle in Luk7:47).

--- S.D.G. ---

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